

In Memoriam... Dorothy Wentworth

By KATHERINE PILLSBURY

Dorothy D. Wentworth, Duxbury Town Historian for 33 years, died December 13, 1998. Before retiring to Virginia in 1984, she had dedicated over three decades of her life to discovering the history of Duxbury and circulating her findings among residents. Those who knew her recall a true New Englander, modest in mein, but focused and dedicated. She educated herself first, and then others, about Duxbury's long and unique history. Describing her work as Town Historian, she wrote, "It takes a great deal of time, a special interest and insight, some skill, but most of all a fascination with finding and using facts."

Dorothy Wentworth first became interested in local history when she traced her and her husband's own Standish Shore property back to Pilgrim settlers. Intrigued, she branched out to learn about neighboring properties, and eventually the entire town.

Mrs. Wentworth did not consider herself a scholar, but she was a meticulous researcher. She gave little credence to hearsay and supposition, but searched for the facts in original documents. She became adept at tracing old boundaries and began to learn about the old families, not only where they lived, but who married whom, where they worked, and the names and birth dates of their children.

Dorothy Wentworth's memory was as extraordinary as her research. She could recite from memory dates and facts about Duxbury's First Comers as easily as if they were near neighbors. In fact, she would describe them as one would an old friend.

Not limiting herself to paper research, Mrs. Wentworth reached back to an older generation, talking to and recording stories oldtimers told. She admired fellow historian and writer Gershom Bradford who shared his own family's long history with her. In the mid-sixties he and his brother gave the Bradford House to the historical society.

Mrs. Wentworth frequented garage sales, local auctions and church fairs, picking up important historical materials and early photographs. She was friendly with carpenters and builders who often called her to construction sites to investigate unusual features in antique houses. She gave talks to just about every local organization and answered questions from individuals. As a result, townspeople shared her enthusiasm for Duxbury's unique heritage, and several residents have been inspired to expand on her research.

Starting in the 1960s the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society began publishing Dorothy Wentworth's work. Her guide to Duxbury sites, *Roundabout Duxbury*, came out in 1965. She wrote the standard Duxbury history, *Settlement and Growth of Duxbury* in 1973, and the *Aldens in Alden House* in 1980. All these publications remain in print.

Mrs. Wentworth supported and encouraged fellow researchers, as long as they held high standards. She

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abhorred sloppy or inaccurate work. When she came across mistakes, she was apt to write corrections and opinions in the margins of the offending work. Readers often come across these comments, so her presence and her influence continues.

Dorothy Wentworth's interests extended to town affairs. She took the responsibility for approving street names seriously, agreeing only to those names which were suitable and appropriate.

As Mrs. Wentworth approached retirement she rightfully feared that no one person could undertake all the facets of her work. She suggested instead that individual researchers undertake selected topics. It was a successful plan, partly because she kept in touch by mail, encouraging the researchers and offering them further information. Much of this work continues, as interest in Duxbury history continues.

When she retired to Virginia, Dorothy Wentworth left her library of books and photographs, as well as her research notes, to the library named in her honor, the Wentworth Library and Archives, at the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society. She also left packages of individual notes with selected researchers and gave books and other materials to both the schools and the Duxbury Free Library. This material has provided the basis for articles and publications on local history over the past 15 years.

Dorothy D. Wentworth certainly proved in her life that an individual can make a difference. By virtue of her ability, determination, dedication, and enthusiasm, she brought Duxbury's past alive. We have much to thank her for and we shall miss her.



Learn About Ferrets

Do ferrets make good pets? Ferret owner Patrick Theran will be at Duxbury Free Library to show off his pet ferret and talk about what it is like to have a ferret for a pet, on Wednesday, Dec. 30, at 3:30 pm, and on Thursday, Dec. 31 at 10:30 am. Children of all ages are invited to attend, however those under 6 must be accompanied by an adult. To register for this program, call 934-2721 ext. 115.

